

chief may direct that operational control be passed to the conventional unit commander who will exercise it through the established SOF chain of command. Some sample situations would be when a conventional force commander requests SOF support for a specific mission, when the commander in chief commits a conventional force to JSOA, or when the area of operations of a conventional force encompasses a JSOA and link-up is imminent. The SOCCE facilitates the command relationships by making sure they are understood by all units involved during various phases of an operation.

SF may request and receive operational control of conventional units to support a specific combined counterinsurgency operation, as a reaction or reinforcing element for a special operation, or for logistical support during combat operations after link-up, or during contingency operations when the senior Army headquarters in an operational area is an Army Special Operations Task Force.

Since all of this sounds very formal, and perhaps awkward, a practical example may be in order:

During one JRTC rotation, an A

Team reporting on enemy movements along an avenue of approach (AA) to a drop zone could not be exfiltrated due to extended bad weather. Eventually, the A Team ran out of batteries to operate its radios and lost communications. The SOCCE coordinated a contingency exfiltration plan with the brigade S-3 Air.

During the early evening, the exfiltration was done and the A Team was debriefed by the brigade commander, S-3, and S-2. The detachment was able to lay out exactly where prepared enemy fighting positions were at choke points along the AA leading from the drop zone to the conventional force's objectives. They provided a summary of enemy activities during their time in the operational area and what they thought the enemy might do. This helped the commander assess probable enemy courses of action during his attack.

The SOCCE is the key to coordinating conventional and special operations. To do their jobs, the members of the element must know the conventional force's tactical SOP and have detailed primary, alternate, and contingency communications plans. They must ensure that the conventional

force commander understands how SF capabilities strengthen his own operations and how he can help overcome SF weaknesses.

The SOCCE must be proactive in coordinating operations and sharing intelligence. It must function as an integrated part of the conventional commander's staff; only then can it ensure that operations involving conventional and special operations forces are executed successfully the first time, every time.

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Training

For Battle Staff Competency

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Battle staff competency is a critical element of unit readiness, but one that is difficult to achieve without a carefully planned training program. A battle staff training program should teach subordinate leaders and staff officers the skills and teamwork they need to plan and execute combat operations. This is a challenge for a battalion commander, considering the many mission requirements that units have today, along with the effects of those re-

quirements on the available time, personnel, and material resources.

I want to share an approach to battle staff training that gives a battalion commander a way to coach his officers and staff members while also improving his tactical decision making skills.

There are several things a commander must do at the outset to ensure that his battle staff training is effective:

- Spell out his commitment to professional development and battle staff

competency in two critical documents—his command philosophy and his training guidance. Battle staff training can easily be overcome by events if it is not programmed on short-range and long-range training calendars and training schedules.

- Conduct battle staff training during the training cycle. The cycle is designed to build the individual or small-unit skills necessary to overall success. In a good unit where noncom-

missioned officers (NCOs) serve as the principal trainers for individual and team training, officers and staff members should be available to develop their NCOs' individual, leadership, and staff skills.

- Tie battle staff competency to the unit's mission essential task list (METL). Junior leaders and staff officers are more productive and benefit in the long run when their professional development is focused on collective METL tasks and the associated sub-unit and individual tasks.

- Establish the focus of his staff during the period he allocates for staff training. The staff is always engaged in the routine work of the organization, but only the most serious issues should interfere with battle staff training.

- Emphasize detailed knowledge of the battlefield operating systems (BOS). A thoroughly integrated, combat-ready staff knows the details of the battlefield operating systems as they pertain to each staff section and to the staff as a whole. Coordination and the exchange of information are most effective when knowledgeable people work as a team and are familiar with what is relevant to combat orders, coordination, and execution.

Both tactical knowledge of the BOSs and their sound application are essential for all officers. Expert instructors are available within the combined arms team: The fire support officer (FSO) should teach fire support along with the air liaison officer (ALO). The S-2—in coordination with brigade and division intelligence personnel—should teach the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process.

The best BOS instruction demonstrates the way the systems interact. The IPB relates to the fire support plan, for example, because named areas of interest are targeted. A well-schooled staff coordinates and integrates combined arms concepts, and this facilitates the tactical decision making process and the development of plans.

Since tactical decision making and staff planning are critical training tasks, Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training*, encourages "command group training,"

such as command post and map exercises and tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs). The staff exercise is a "command group" training method that makes the deliberate planning process easier. It is particularly adaptable to the cycle. A properly executed staff exercise is a good way for every staff member and unit leader to develop his tactical planning skills.

To initiate a STAFFEX, a battalion commander can request a complete combat order from his brigade headquarters; this order then becomes the basis for the battalion's mission analysis and restated mission. The order also gives the commander an opportunity to improve his ability to provide clear, concise guidance on the many subjects he must address before the estimate process begins. Everyone on the staff is engaged in staff estimates and associated briefings, the commander's decision, additional planning guidance, and order production.

Everyone, including the commander, will improve and learn through a continuous after-action review (AAR) process. The BOSs are a key focus of these discussions. The staff produces an order, prepares a backbrief for the brigade commander, and briefs the final order to the company commanders and selected platoon leaders. These officers, in turn, issue orders, coordinate, rehearse, and conduct AARs of their respective operations.

A STAFFEX can be conducted in a manner that provides time for the staff and the commanders to prepare for the green cycle. A battalion that initiates its green cycle by airborne assault, for example, can use the STAFFEX, in coordination with its brigade headquarters, to produce the necessary order and movement matrixes in the yellow cycle. Company commanders can prepare orders and backbriefs and rehearse their tactical operations. This provides time in the beginning to do things right and to share lessons during scheduled periods of professional exchange.

As a battalion commander, I scheduled at least one STAFFEX each quarter. If the focus of the green cycle

was squad or platoon training, the situation often allowed professional development operations such as a command post exercise or a TEWT with the company commanders. This continued exchange of tactical thinking and communication between command posts was effective multi-echelon training.

Staff, command post, and tactical exercises were as fast-paced as the training level and the situation allowed. I established a goal of 18 hours for deliberate planning that led to a published order by the staff. Several additional hours were needed to provide time for AARs and professional discussion. Accelerated exercises were conducted to produce orders in six to 12 hours. In the yellow cycle, staff exercises were normally conducted in the battalion headquarters, but the work was sometimes conducted in the battalion tactical operations center (set up in garrison) to condition the staff to operations in the field.

Commanders in today's Army are faced with ever-increasing demands, but battle staff training can continue to be done if it is integrated into a unit's total training and operations package. This training engages staff officers, commanders, and small-unit leaders. Properly scheduled and focused, it can save prime, green-cycle training time and lead to greater success in collective unit training.

Achieving battle staff competency is key to a unit's tactical success and overall readiness. Training of this nature—coupled with sound professional development practices that include coaching and mentoring at the unit level—will therefore continue to be a high priority for the Army's senior leaders. Sound, well-planned training will produce the battle staffs that direct and support the force that will fight and win on tomorrow's battlefield.

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